

Town of Paonia

Date: July 15, 2020

To: Jamie Connell, BLM State Director

From: Mayor Mary Bachran

Dear Director Connell:

The Town of Paonia has appreciated being a cooperator in the Bureau of Land Management Uncompahgre Field Office Resource Management Plan (RMP) revision process for the last 10+ years. Unfortunately, the final plan, released on April 17, 2020, does not take into account the Town's previous comments, dismissed our protest, and is a reflection of the energy-dominance agenda coming from Washington D.C. instead of the priorities of our local community on the Western Slope of Colorado. The Town has participated on behalf of its residents at every step in the process, and we are disappointed to not see our concerns addressed in the Approved RMP and Record of Decision.

The Town previously commented on the Draft EIS, in a letter submitted on October 27, 2016. In our comment, we requested the BLM adopt the North Fork Alternative Plan to provide a community-driven management framework to protect the North Fork Valley's thriving agricultural economy, scenic vistas, and healthy populations of wildlife. We expressed serious concerns with the then Preferred Alternative of the draft EIS because it would have failed to protect these values.

The Town subsequently submitted a protest on the Proposed RMP/Final EIS on July 23, 2019. In our protest, we noted that the Final EIS ignores the input of the Town across the board. The Final EIS downplays the significant health and environmental risks associated with oil and gas development proximate to our community, not to mention the impact on the local economy, and offers the entirety of the federal mineral estate within the North Fork Valley to development without adequately assessing the impacts on surrounding communities.

The Approved RMP and ROD fails to protect the Town and the surrounding lands and resources that make the Town so unique. At a time when our local economic outlook is uncertain due to the COVID global pandemic, the BLM has chosen to create additional uncertainty by pressing forward with this plan that will have significant impacts on our local economy. The Approved RMP and ROD is inconsistent with our local economic development visioning, which relies on many diverse small businesses including agriculture, technology, and creative industries. We respectfully request that the BLM withdraw the RMP and work with us on a new path forward, one that adequately addresses our previous concerns. The Town's strong preference is protection from the risks of oil and gas development and certainty in this matter, whether through a new path forward either administratively or through federal legislation.

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The Town has repeatedly requested strong protections for our source water and other domestic water supplies, for our Town infrastructure, for health risks from natural gas development, for our critical wildlife resources, and for recreational management of Jumbo Mountain. Our water supplies, wildlife resources, scenery, opportunities for recreation, and environmental and community health must be protected from irresponsible oil and gas developments in order for our local economy to thrive. We must ensure that our public lands are managed in a manner that allows for and protects current uses, and that adequately protects the shared resources like clean air and water in which we all depend.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Paonia Town Council,

Mary Bachran
Mayor

CC:

Jared Polis, Governor
Sen. Michael Bennet
Sen. Cory Gardner
Rep. Scott Tipton
Colorado State Rep. Julie McCluskie
Colorado State Sen. Kerry Donovan
Delta County BOCC